

So much more could be written regarding Christian marriage and divorce. However, I only have covered the purpose I had in mind for this book. I add a few concluding comments on where we have been.

We began by sketching some changing attitudes on marriage and divorce in recent decades. When I was ordained, divorce within the church was seen as an unforgivable sin and a disgrace. Divorced Christians were treated as failures. A clergyman whose marriage broke up was removed from his pulpit and given his walking papers. In recent years, the stigma of divorce has been softened or removed.

We turned next to the Bible and examined what it says about marriage and divorce. We challenged the reigning conclusion that God's purpose in creating man and woman was that they should marry and remain married to each other for the remainder of their lives. The Bible does not say or even imply that. Other lifestyles are followed by the people of God all throughout the Old and New Testaments.

As we moved through the Scriptures, we looked at the variety of relationships men and women had with each other. In the New Testament, we looked at what Jesus taught about marriage, divorce and remarriage, concluding that the traditional view prohibiting the Christian blessing of marriage to someone who had been divorced needs to be re-examined.

We then moved ahead to the present. Our first concern was for those who were considering divorce. We encouraged them to take a last look around. The changing ethos regarding marriage these days can permit a couple to end their marriage in haste. A good evaluation of the strength of a marriage, as well as its difficulties, is a good investment of time, energy and professional help.

But that good look around causes many to conclude that the time for divorce has come. It is useful to have the necessary background to make that decision. This book tries to offer some of that, as well as what to do in the most pressing of problems.

We moved on to those who have been divorced and discussed the aftershocks. The decision to separate can be painful and depressing. It is often a perilous journey, especially for the one on whom the divorce has been forced. But both partners are affected by a wide range of emotions. Whether guilty, innocent or both, rigorous readjustments are needed. The road to recovery is rugged and steep, but we have a wonderful Guide and God to help us up.

We then introduced a series of specific pitfalls that must be circumvented in order for recovery to be successful. Helping children adjust is particularly critical. All the evidence is not yet in about how divorce affects young children, but the love of their parents surely helps them on their way to a good and happy life.

Teaching yourself how to handle feelings of guilt and self-pity and anger and loneliness are slow moving but essential maneuvers. Finally, learning to forgive yourself and your former spouse gives you freedom to move on.

In the last chapter we examined the personal issue of sex. There are many Christians who will disagree with these conclusions. But what a healthy adult Christian, who desires to give and receive the love and affection of another is expected to do and not do, is worth an open and honest book.

I think of the young women who came to me in tears one day to tell me that her husband had left her for a woman down at the office. The wife had been complaining to her friends and support group for months about how thoughtless her husband was and how he forced her to live in his shadow. She asked what she was supposed to do now that he had gone and left her alone. I said I could not tell her what to do, but with all that had stifled her in their marriage, surely the time for divorce had come. "You are free to become the woman you always planned to be. Now go and do it. Take custody of yourself!" I told her.

I am happy to tell you that she did.